

## News

### Archives

## It's Farmer vs EPA

ELKTON, MD (AP) - It's farmer vs. federal agency.

William Spry says if he harvests his wheat as he has been doing for decades, he will be jailed. Officials for the Environmental Protection Agency, the group Spry levels his accusation against, say that would not happen.

The bone of contention between the 84-year-old farmer and the EPA is a 50-acre portion of the 400-acre farm that was declared a Superfund site earlier this year.

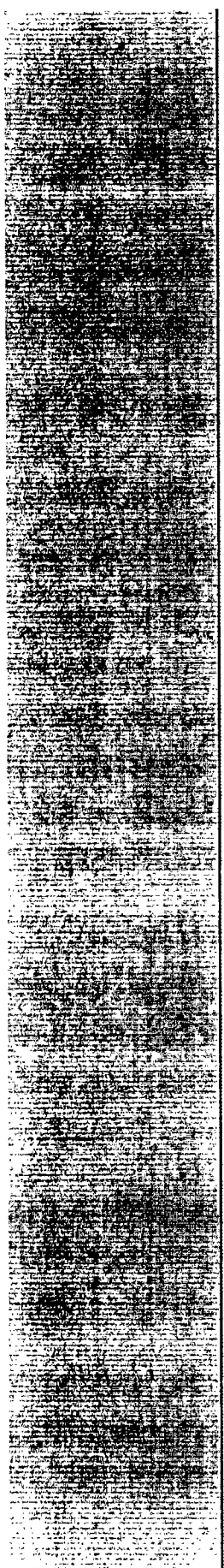
The news that the acreage was contaminated with military ordnance was no surprise to Spry.

"I've known that stuff has been there for almost 60 years, but no one ever said anything about it until now," Spry said.

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"Now I've got a field full of wheat that they let me plant last fall, but they won't let me harvest this summer," Spry told the Cecil Whig.

He said he has been pulling small hunks of rusted metal out of the farm since he started renting the property 30 years ago.

Arthur O'Connell, chief of the Maryland Department of Environment's Superfund Program, said his agency has known for decades that a large pit of military-grade munitions was buried north of Elkton. But exactly where the disposal pit was, was not known until the Department of Defense found documents giving an approximate location.

Commonly referred to in the industry as a "firehole," the pit was a product of Triumph Industries, a World War II-era munitions factory.

Charles Fitzsimmons, the EPA's onsite coordinator and the man who ordered the section of farm closed, said there is little Spry or anyone can do.

"For better or worse, the EPA's role here is to clean up the site, and I had to

make a difficult decision from a public safety standpoint," Fitzsimmons said. "The materials may not have caused any casualties or injury for 60 years, but now that we know that it's here, Mr. Spry or someone else could sue us if they were to trespass and somehow get hurt."

Despite knowing about the buried, decaying ordnance, Spry kept doing what he'd always done on the property. Inadvertently, Spry also spread the munitions over a larger and larger area.

"I don't imagine there is one inch of that soil that hasn't been run over by plows, rototillers and trucks," said Dick Herron, a cousin of property owner David Herron, whom the newspaper could not reach for comment.

The battle between Spry and the EPA may become moot if David Herron gets his way. He wants to rezone the farm so it can be developed for residential and commercial use, according to a rezoning application filed with the Cecil County government.